

TECH TALK: COMPANIES, SPACES AND PEOPLE

Anderson: We Want Your Businesses Now

Trying to attract entrepreneurs to a community requires innovative approaches as the competition is intense. A partnership led by Anderson University (AU) did just that earlier this year with one of the early successes music to the ears of university and city officials.

Kirby Gilliam, owner of PlainSong Music Services, grew up in Anderson and is a 2010 AU grad with a degree in music education. She started her business in mid-2016 with services including the growing field of music therapy (using music as a tool to reach non-musical goals), adaptive lessons (music training for people with special needs) and private lessons (guitar, piano, ukulele and voice).

Preparing for her June 2017 wedding, she and her fiancé “had been talking about moving to Noblesville or Indianapolis. But the Anderson Now program has given us incentive to stay. The more we researched and thought about it, we realized we could do good things in this community – there’s so much need and possibility there.”

Anderson Now is selecting 10 Indiana college graduates who are willing to move or start their business in the city and providing them with up to \$25,000 each in educational loan repayment. That initially attracts some, including Gilliam.

“I thought it was really neat,” she says of her initial reaction. “But I had already established a business and I didn’t know if this was for me. I was a little apprehensive. I read about it a little bit more and my fiancé said, ‘Go for it!’ So I went for it and here we are.”

While the loan repayment might be the attention grabber, both Gilliam and Deborah Miller-Fox, an AU professor and director of the university’s IDEA-U initiative, believe the other aspects of the program carry greater significance.

“It’s the mentoring and support. Owning your own business can be a really lonely road. And starting a new business can be overwhelming and lonely and terrifying,” Miller-Fox imparts with a chuckle. “Because you don’t really know what you don’t know. This is an opportunity to become part of a community of other small business owners here in the city of Anderson.

“Another really valuable piece is that you have to complete an online application through the Bankable microloan program. You’re not required to accept a microloan, but that process helps us to vet their application. It helps us determine if they are viable for the program and it makes them pre-approved for a loan if and when they need that. Bankable also does a lot of mentoring and education.”

All Anderson Now participants will have access to the IDEA-U innovation lab, created to foster collaboration and entrepreneurship on the AU campus. It will function as a type of co-working space, with the added ability of “drawing on the intellectual capital of faculty and staff.”

PlainSong Music Services and a lawn care/landscaping business were part of the program as of this interview in mid-May. Miller-Fox notes a handful of others were far along in the application process. There were 24 inquiries in the first three months, with approximately two-thirds having some connection to AU.

“Our alums seem excited about the program and the way that we’re trying to attract people to the city of Anderson,” she conveys. “We’re trying to be as non-prescriptive as possible. We’re willing to be surprised. We don’t want to squelch a business or an opportunity because it didn’t fit into the box that we imagined initially. We do require that they live here in Anderson. We want them engaged in the community.”



Anderson Now participants will be able to utilize the IDEA-U space on the Anderson University campus.

Co-Working With a Twist in Wabash

Co-working spaces are emerging with increasing frequency. But how many meet these criteria:

- An insurance and risk management company is leading the way
- There is absolutely no cost to utilizing the space
- It’s located in a small city

The community is Wabash. Parker Beauchamp is CEO of INGUARD, a business that traces its roots back nearly 150 years. He describes what makes this collaboration special.

“It’s unique that a university (Manchester) has partnered with a private, for-profit organization like INGUARD, has their signage on our building and has space throughout our building. With a third partner in there (the Economic Development Group of Wabash County), what a perfect marriage between government, a collegiate institution and private enterprise. That’s cool, and I think a lot’s going to come from it.

“We’re doing it for free and we didn’t use anybody else’s money to build it,” Beauchamp continues. “We’re doing it for free because I want to make a contribution and we’re drawing a battle line for rural America right here in Wabash, Indiana. It’s a fight that I want to help in any way I can.”

Adversity struck early. Just a week after the February 28 grand opening of Innovate at INGUARD, a nearby lumber yard fire necessitated more than a month of work to remove the smell from the building. But users have come, with Beauchamp estimating 500 people taking advantage of the space in its first 45 days.

A variety of entrepreneurship, fellowship and business consulting programs are among the offerings. Schools and non-profits are taking advantage. One of the first users was researchers from Duke University, in town to study the Wabash County Promise program.

Beauchamp says it will be a number of years before its success can be determined. But for now, he cites “university signage in downtown Wabash, on a company on the move

RESOURCES: Anderson Now at www.anderson.edu/academics/idea-u/anderson-now | Kirby Gilliam, PlainSong Music Services, at www.facebook.com/plainsongmusicservices

choosing to do business in a rural town – that creates a certain energy for the downtown, hopefully starting to move the needle culturally to become more mindful about innovation and entrepreneurship.

“We’re not going to win by stealing a company from another community; we’re going to win by what we can breed up through the people we have here. Companies that stay become community partners, they volunteer, give money and are more responsible for long-term development. That’s our hope – to get things started.”

For now, he remarks, the best thing is the “vibe for the space in general. You go down there, it’s light and airy; it breeds creativity and an atmosphere of fun. It’s just so different than anywhere I go and I’ve

been to some really cool headquarters – this is right there with them.”

Beauchamp speculates on the future: “By the end of the year, I’d love to have 100 active users – individuals with a job who have access to the building 24/7, 365, trying to start a company, trying to get something going. We want to engage all levels of schools. I hope we have put some roots in those relationships.”

Ultimately, it comes back to his hometown and trying to making a difference.

“Yeah, these spaces are popping up. Ours has been in the works for a year and a half. We’re doing it in a part of the world, though, where they’re not popping up all over.”

RESOURCE: Parker Beauchamp, Innovate at INGUARD, at www.inguard.com/innovate

Making It Work Well Remotely

Co-working spaces are commonly regarded as the place for entrepreneurs to develop their dreams. But Jeff Middlesworth, chief product officer for Emma (a Nashville, Tennessee-based provider of email marketing software and services) has found an additional benefit.

Middlesworth, hired as the second full-time employee of ExactTarget in 2001 and part of that team for 14 years, works remotely. He spends part of his time at Launch Fishers.

“At Launch Fishers, there is a big community that has been touched by or directly worked for ExactTarget. I remember the first couple of times I started to go there, it felt like a small reunion of sorts,” he recalls. “It’s fun to walk by someone and say, ‘Remember when we went through this one thing at ExactTarget; do you remember how we did that?’

“You just get to ideate with some folks. Just having that community to bounce ideas off of, particularly those who have gone through it before, is just fantastic. Sometimes the perspective of those folks is phenomenal. That was an unexpected bliss moment for me.”

Middlesworth, with his wife and four daughters, had no desire to leave central Indiana. He is able to successfully lead engineering, product management and product development units because of the philosophy at Emma. A majority of executives and about a quarter of the engineers on his team do not live in Nashville.

“If you’re going to be the only remote employee out of 200, 300, it’s probably not going to work out very well,” he shares. Speaking of the engineers and home bases that

include Michigan, North Carolina and Oregon, he adds, “We just want talent wherever talent can be found. Remoting is part of the Emma culture.”

But he does travel frequently. To Nashville and to many customer locations. He plans diligently in order to avoid too many nights away from home, with direct flights playing a critical role in visits to cities such as San Francisco, New York, Seattle and Portland, Oregon.

“(Of those four), the only one we don’t have a direct flight to is Portland. That really, really helps you not spend a lot of time away from home. For San Francisco, it shaves off probably eight hours of travel time on a round trip. I can head out there, only be gone one night and still have a day and a half of really great productivity. Those direct flights make a big difference.”

While Indianapolis has enjoyed strong success in adding to its direct flight portfolio, ironically there is no such connection to Nashville. That makes driving the better option, with no shortage of preparation to ensure high productivity while on the road and at the company’s headquarters – as well as returning after typically no more than two nights away.

Working remotely and in the high-energy climate of a Launch Fishers has its advantages, but Middlesworth does cite one challenge.

“The disciplines and industry we are in are fast moving, a little chaotic but also creative. In all three of those, collaboration is critical. The problems you solve are complex, the user experiences you want to build have a lot of intricacies to them,” he explains.



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“When you want to collaborate, that’s hard. The technology of videoconferencing has made this so much better, but what hasn’t been fixed yet in my opinion is the whiteboard.

“When spending time together, sometimes the most impactful moments in my world are at the whiteboard. Working through a problem, drawing diagrams, articulating things in a visual manner. Sometimes you draw a couple of boxes with a line between them and it makes things a lot better.”

RESOURCE: Jeff Middlesworth, Emma, at www.myemma.com